

POLITICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A UTOBIOGRAPHY is one of the most attractive and one of the most curious departments of literature. Most people like to talk about themselves. Some feel an urge to write about themselves—to tell their contemporaries and posterity who they are, what they have done, what they have tried to do. *Non omnis moriar* Ars longa, vita brevis, Exzgi monumtntum aere perennius.* Such familiar tags embody the yearning for a longer course than mortality permits. From one point of view autobiography is a protest of the human spirit against the inexorable limitations of time and space, an endeavour to establish contact with a future that we shall never see. There is pathos as well as pride in the attempt.

The most celebrated confessions, such as those of Augustine, Rousseau, Casanova, Benjamin Franklin, Gibbon, Goethe, Chateaubriand, Newman, Renan and Mill, are records of spiritual experience, intellectual development or amorous adventure. In a widely different field the significance of a man of action may preserve his testimony from oblivion, however meagre his inner life and however unskilful his pen. Political autobiography is the meeting place between history and literature. Yet the mere narration of memorable events is no passport to immortality: there must be a revelation of personality as well. The best political autobiographies are those which most fully reproduce the character, the temperament and the outlook of the author. The present survey is confined to modern rulers and ministers, makers of history who have told their own tale. The onlookers, with Saint-Simon at their head, are in another class*

The first outstanding political autobiography of the modern

world, which we may roughly date from the opening of the sixteenth century, is that of Babur, the founder of the Mogul Empire. Though his narrative has reached us in an incomplete form, only covering eighteen of his forty-seven years, it is none the less an imposing literary monument filling two large volumes in the admirable edition of Mrs. Beveridge. Beginning with his twelfth year, when the precocious boy became ruler of Farghana, the record is carried up to the eve of his death in 1530. Unlike most autobiographies, which are compiled when the long days draw to a close, Babur's story is